

LITTLE RED BALL

by Rune Morgan

The little red ball thumped against the hardwood floor and jumped into the air. Reaching the height of its climb, it paused, spinning in place just for a second before falling. Rather than smash back into the floor though, it plopped into a small soft hand.

Between bounces Kyle would glance up at the closet door in the living room and think about how much he hated Mommy's friends. They came over almost every night, drinking beer, smoking smelly cigarettes and something else that smelled worse, and yelling and cussing and fighting. Whenever they came over she would leave him alone in the living room. Sometimes it was to go out with her friends and get more beer; other times it was after most of them had left and she would take one of the men upstairs. Kyle hated being left alone with the woman in the closet.

The first time he saw her she was standing in the back between the coats. Her eyes were all white with lines of blood. Her skin was a slimy blue-brown that reminded Kyle of slugs and earthworms. She watched him without blinking while Mommy pulled out a jacket to wear to the store with her friends. As the door swung

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shut, poor four-year-old Kyle screamed as the woman reached out, grasping into the air after him.

For a moment he thought Mommy might stay. She spun around frightened and lifted him in her arms. "What's the matter baby boy?"

But when he told her she only frowned and told him to stop being such a sissy, that there was no woman in the closet. Kyle knew what he'd seen though and, even if she never left the closet, she did sometimes open the door to peek and grasp at him. He bounced the ball, caught it, and checked the closet door. Closed. Bounce, catch, check. Closed. Bounce, cat... Kyle frowned as the ball hit the tips of his waiting fingers and fell to the floor.

Thump.

His clear blue eyes followed its path as it rolled away from him. It got further and further away before he thought to scramble after it on hand and knee. Kyle was quick though. He managed to nab the rolling ball just before it rolled through the cracked open closet door.

Kyle froze. The door was open and he was right in front of it. His heart beat faster than he had ever feel it beat before. Slowly, he lifted his head, peering into the endless dark of the crack. Only, the darkness wasn't endless. A single bloody white eye gazed straight at him.

A chilled breath hit him in the face and, before he could push himself away from her, a hand shot from the closet and clamped around his wrist. This close to her, Kyle could make out everything about her. Her eyes were completely white, without color or pupil. Her blue-brown skin was slippery and cold, like sticking your hand in a mud puddle. Strands of long black hair hung from her head in places and were caked with dirt. Other parts of her head were bald. She smelled like dirt and she made a noise, a wheeze like the one he made once when he was sick. Kyle tried to pull his wrist away from her, but she was too strong. With a

single tug, she pulled Kyle into the darkness of the closet, the door slamming shut behind him.

The darkness around him was thick. It felt heavy. He tried to scream but nothing came out, like the darkness had a hand over his mouth. There was no sign of the woman but that didn't stop him from imagining her grabbing him from behind and eating him alive. It didn't happen though. He just sat there, pulling his knees up to his chest and tucking his face behind them for what seemed like forever.

Then there was a click. A line of light cut into the darkness as the door swung open. Through a cloud of tears he could see a policeman and his living room behind him. The policeman turned and yelled, "I found the kid ! Call of the Amber Alert!" More policeman were there and so was Grandma! Grandma was talking to a policeman and looked over at him. She smiled and burst into tears before walking over toward him. The policeman leaned over and lifted him. Now he could see Mommy and some of her friends. They were talking to police also but had their hands behind their backs with handcuffs on.

The policeman holding him spun and passed him to grandma. Looking again into the closet, he saw her. Her blind white eyes never blinked as she raised her arm out toward him. Kyle held his out under hers, letting the little red ball plop into his small soft hand.

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